"THE LOST LEMON MINE"

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT IT

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The history of the lost Lemon Mine was told to me, bit by bit, year by year, around many a camp fire, by that old frontiersman, Lafayette French, as we travelled, prospected and camped in the fastness of the Rocky Mountains in the years that are past.

For a better understanding of this story I will tell you who Lafayette French was. He (French) was born in Pennsylvania in 1840 and came to the Western States as a very young man, and (There he) spent several years on the American frontier. He appeared in the Northwest Territory as an Indian trader and buffalo hunter in the pre-Mounted Police days. He came after the Lemon Mine had been found and lost by the two prospectors that he had grubstaked in Montana previously.

(One, "Blackjack", was dead, - murdered on the eve of discovery by the other, Lemon, who was driven insane by his deed. Lafayette French came to this country to find the lost Lemon Mine.)

At the time the Blackfoot Treaty was signed in 1870, he was operating a trading post at the Blackfoot Crossing. This was the camp ground of "Crowfoot", mighty Chief of the Blackfeet, and war chief of the Blackfeet Bloods, North Piegans and South Piegan tribes. (These tribes comprised the entire Indian population of the great plains stretching throughout Alberta into Montana. The remnants of the old Iroquois confederacy had been driven into this territory and absorbed into the Western tribes.) Bitterly aware of the white traders policy, this last domain had long been kept inaccessible to the (white men.) Over it ruled "Crowfoot" inimical to anything but his subjects interests. He was absolute. He maintained his own police force, and they carried out his order to the letter.

There was no appeal from his decision. Today we have Dictators but no dictator in the world of today is more absolute than was the mighty "Crowfoot". If a member of the tribe, or a whole village deserved punishment, they disappeared and the places that then knew them, knew them no more for ever. Nor were his decisions ever questioned. This would be very unwise in the days, and under the rule of "Crowfoot".

French early won the friendship of the noted Blackfoot chief and became his confidant and adviser, indicative of the trader's personality and character. While Colonel McLeod, head of the N.W.M.P. for a week, waited in his tent, day after day, for the chiefs to sign the Blackfoot Treaty, "Crowfoot" was conferring with French about it. "Crowfoot's" confidence in, and his esteem for French continued until his death. He paid French an annual visit when he later located a ranch at High River. However, among the rank and file of the Indians, Fre ch who they called "Onesaw", or the Left Hand, (because he was left handed), was

more feared than respected.

Shortly after the Treaty, French and another Indian trader, O.H.Smith, or "Smithy", started a ranch at what is now High River. They had a bunch of breeding mares and one hundred and fifty head of cattle, and They were the first men to break the sod in this district. Their ranch was one of the stopping places on the old Fort Benton and Edmonton trail, and by which all supplies came into the country at that time -- coming up the Missouri River to Fort Benton. The stage dropped the local mails here and a soap box served as the first Post Office in High River.

My
The first job I got in this country was with them in the spring of 1883. In the autumn of that year they took up what is now the O.H. Ranch, twenty-five miles west, and moved their stock to it. Next year French went to the Stony Indian reservation in the foothills (now Morleyville), as Government Ration Issuer and remained there for several years.

(He did this) in order to get acquainted with the Stony Indians and, if possible, learn from them the location of the Lemon Mine. They alone had this knowledge.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE LEMON MINE

Sometime, about the spring of 1870, a party of miners left Tobacco Plains in Montana to prospect the North Saskatchewan River, known even at that time to contain showings of fine gold. In the party were two men known as "Blackjack" and "Lemon". The former had the reputation of being the best prospector in the West, having found some of the richest placer camps in the Western States and was the real discoverer of the famous Cariboo diggings in British Columbia. These two experienced prospectors were staked by French and travelled with the party to the Saskatchewan River. They found gold, but not in paying quantities, so in the fall they decided to leave the rest of the party and return to Tobacco Plains to winter.

They gladly availed themselves of the opportunity to travel south with a large half-breed party, headed by one Le Mouse whom I knew well, as it (This escort) offered protection against the Blackfeet (and Blood Indians) who were hostile. They travelled south by the old trail (which lay) along the foothills. (La Mouse and his) as the party were bound for Fort Standoff; "Blackjack" and "Lemon" finally separated + headed for Tobacco Plains (a large R.C. Mission in Montana), (so they separated.)

The two prospectors were supposed to have gone up High River and over the mountains by an old (and plain) trail used by the Indians from Tobacco Plains who drove large bands of horses into what is now Alberta, every fall and drove them back again loaded with Pemmican. "Blackjack" and "Lemon" were panning the rivers as they proceeded. They followed showings of gold to the head of a mountain stream. There they found rich diggings from grass roots to bed rock, (about five feet.)

They sank two pits, and in bringing their horses in from picket, accidentally found the ledge from which the gold came -- a ledge of decomposed quartz. French, who saw samples of this rock at Ft. Benton, described it as resembling a body of gold with a little rock shot into it. The sample of placer was coarser than anything ever found in the placer gulches of the Western States, (on display in a window that winter in Helena.) Is it any wonder, little therefore that many men then young and in their prime, spent the rest of their lives in a useless search for this Eldorado? and French was one of these.

(In the camp) that night the two adventurers (had a disagreement) as to whether or not they should stake the find and return in the spring. (One favoured this -- the other opposed it.) The argument finally terminated in "Lemon" Dramatic killing his partner with an axe as he lay in his blanket. However much he might have wished to flee from the scene of

the tragedy, he could not do so until daylight and so he built a huge fire and with his gun on his arm he marched back and forth all night. Little did he think that two pairs of human eyes (watched him and) had witnessed the entire tragedy. Two young Stoney braves, William and Daniel Bandow had followed the pair, (had) watched them sink the holes (and) saw them panning the gravel and were waiting for what those (strange) white men might do (on the morrow.)

As (the) night wore on "Lemon", half crazed with the thought of the terrible deed he had done (in his passion, and) the Indians with their dim sense of humor, whistled occasionally to further distress the (unfortunate "Lemon".) With (the first streak of dawn) he mounted the big roan (horse that) French had given him and took the trail across the mountains.

The Indians packed up (what was left,) camp outfit, grub, rifle, etc., and taking the two remaining horses started to Morleyville to report to their chief, "Bearpaw". He must have been much

Caution
interested as he swore them never to reveal to any person the location of what they witnessed. (It is not uncommon for whites to commit purgery, but no Indian was ever known to do so.)

Many (of those in late years) who in later endeavoured to locate the lost Lemon Mine know how religiously those two copper sons of the mountains kept their oath. (Many) Bands of horses and herds of cattle, fortunes (in themselves,) to those people, have time and time again been offered, but ~~that strange~~ fear of (the) superstitious fear ~~penalties prescribed by that terrible oath rose up before them~~ Of the wrath of Wah-condah stilled (and they both) their tongues died with the secret still locked in their breasts.

I knew them both well many a time and travelled and camped with them in the mountains. (They were splendid types of the old Indian Chieftain, heads of a large following of their own progeny, ruling their little kingdom with kindness and with wisdom. How I admired this type of Indian -- their dignity, their independence, their kindliness to their own people, their deep

knowledge of nature. That book which is closed to so many contained valuable and interesting secrets.

But to go on with the story -- "Lemon" arrived at the Mission at Tobacco Plains and at once confessed his crime to the Priest, whom he had known the preceding winter. He had with him the gold they had saved on the day of the killing, also samples of the rock which they had found. He seemed half crazed, and his crime weighed heavily upon him. There was at the mission a half-breed, by name John McDougald, a man versed in mountain travel, and the Priest dispatched McDougald to the scene of the tragedy on instructions given by "Lemon" as to the location of it. McDougald found the place, buried "Blackjack" and built a mound of stones over the grave to keep the wild animals from digging up the body and returned to Tobacco Plains. Later the Indians reported to "Bearpaw" the finding of this mound of rock. He at once dispatched William and Daniel with orders

to tear down the mound and scatter the stones. ~~This they did,~~ When they returned and the last trace of a bloody murder ~~was~~ had been removed from the face of mother earth. How well she has hidden her secret (ever since) in spite of despite all efforts to uncover it! ~~The Indians~~ Proclaimed taboo by the medicine men and were ordered to hunt no more in ~~this~~ that locality, ~~nor to use the trail.~~ Mountain trails that are not used soon become impassable and so this trail is not used today -- unless it may be ~~one of those~~ opened up in late years by forest rangers.

(Lemon" spent) Spending the winter with his spiritual friend, the Priest, and although he acted strangely at times, he was for the most part sane enough, and so during the long winter a party was formed and equipped to start in the spring and work the prospect. The party comprised twelve good men with Lemon to lead them. As soon as the snow made it possible travel, a start was made -- but they were not alone. All the miners who had wintered in that part of the country had heard of the rich

find and were filled with hope of much gold to be found. They formed a large party -- about seventy-five men -- and they followed "Lemon" and his men.

They camped at Crow's Nest Lake and proceeded north from there, and "Lemon" camped the party somewhere about six miles from the original find. This was necessary in order to get grass for the large bunch of horses they had. "Lemon" and his party camped some little distance from the main body, and early next morning, leaving two men in camp to look after it, and to kill deer, they started -- followed of course by the other party. "Lemon" was unable to locate the place, and after a fruitless search he concluded he had taken the wrong gulch. This would not go down with those who had followed him, and they accused him of trying to throw them off and threatened to lynch him. He mounted his horse and ran back to camp where he became violently insane. His own party stood guard over him all night and in the morning started back over the mountains. They reached

Tobacco Plains and "Lemon", although he had lucid intervals, he never fully recovered his reason. He lived for many years with his brother who was a cattle rancher in the State of Texas.

So ended the first expedition - and so have ended many more. Every one has been unsuccessful and many of them tragic.

Next year the Priest outfitted another party from Tobacco Plains. This was to have as its leader, McDougald, the man who buried "Blackjack". McDougald, who was at Fort Benton, was to meet the party at Crow's Nest Lake -- in this party was his wife and family. They were to proceed north from there. He left Benton to keep the appointment, but at Fort Kipp (a whiskey trading post), he drank so much booze it killed him and the party waited at Crow's Nest Lake for weeks before hearing of the death of their leader, and so they turned back.

Next year another large party was equipped and got as far as the Lake when mountain fires burnt all the timber and grass and they were forced to abandon the enterprise.

The year following the Priest sent a small party under the guidance of "Lemon", but on nearing the place he went mad again and they were forced to take him back.

It would appear that the Priest now gave up the quest, but it was taken up by others. One of these was the first Lemon party -- a man by the name of Nelson -- but after a summer's useless search, the party disbanded, but each man continued an independent search. It is true that John Lee of Pincher Creek (the original of the prospectors), and French, were associated for several years, but finally French followed a lone trail. Sickness once overtook him back in the wilderness of the hills and he was barely alive when he finally reached my ranch on the head of Willow Creek. There he was nursed back to health and the next spring saw him again ready and eager to renew the search.

It was about this time that it began to enlist my curiosity as to what he was looking for, and slowly and gradually he told me the story as I have set it down here. He began by showing me a rough pen and ink sketch of rivers and mountain ranges and at the head of a stream with three forks was an "X". He told me that the map was made b "Lemon" and that mark was the Lemon Mine -- the richest thing ever found in the Rocky Mountains. He told me that that was the reason he had come to Alberta and said he would continue the search as long as he lived. From that time, until his death fifteen years later, I, along with the late George Emerson, was associated either directly or indirectly with him in his prospecting.

From him I learned the Indian trails, the passes and the camping grounds -- learned how to pack, to trave . and to love the silent mountains, and so, though I found no gold, I can truthfully say now that as the shadows perceptly lengthen year by year, that I have found something that gold cannot buy.

French went about his work methodically -- he was in fact the most methodical man I have ever known. He spent some months in the 90's with the two survivors of the several expeditions that had come into the country. He even had one of them come by pack train to Crow's Nest Lake and then north in an endeavour to have this man identify some of the land marks or the distance travelled by the first expedition headed by "Lemon". He kept La Rouse and his band of half-breeds in the winter of 1883, so as to check up in the spring and to find out where "Lemon" and "Blackjack" parted company with him -- La Rouse going to Fort Kipp and the two prospectors to Tobacco Plains. He and John Lee fed William and his retinue one winter at Lee's ranch on Pincher Creek, and in the spring put twenty-five horses and twenty-five cattle in a pasture to be the property of Stoney William when he showed them the location of the killing. On the second day of the expedition, William said he could go no further -- the terrors of that oath came over him and the expedition was abandoned.

Only a few years before French's death, he made a bargain with the same William to show him the place he had looked for so long. William and his band were on their way to Morley and agreed to camp at the old George Sage place - an abandoned ranch on the middle fork of High River, until French could get George Emerson and myself to join them. That night William died suddenly. His people secured a Red River cart and proceeded with his body to Morleyville. The night of their arrival his son-in-law also died without any warning. Is it any wonder that the Indians believe there is a hoodoo on anyone who tries to locate that place? In fact, old Indians refuse to talk about it and literally freeze up when the name is mentioned.

French was terribly burned in a fire that destroyed the Emerson house on the night of his return from his last prospecting trip. On the evening of his return he wrote me a letter and posted it at the Bar U. In it he said that he had at last located IT, and was coming to High River the following day and

tell me everything. On his arrival he was unable to talk to me and died, and so if he had really solved the problem which had occupied so many years of his life, the secret died with him.

Many attempts have been made since that time. The most notable of which took place in 1929. Many there are who say 'nothing will be found on this side of the mountains' - but geologists designate a tract of country between Crow's Nest Lake and Mist Mountain on the head waters of the Highwood River, as the disturbed area in which precious metals might be found. In my opinion if the Lemon Mine is ever found it will be in this territory, which is really a trough of the Cretaceous sea, bounded on the west by the Paleozoic limestoneof the main range of the Rockies, and on the east by the Livingston range, also of limestone. This trough is now a north and south valle , transversly cut by three watersheds of the Sheep Creek, Highwood and Old Man rivers. The area is rich in coal, some low grade phosphate

rock and low grade deposits of iron. There are interrelated beds of conglomerate ash, a hard green rock, occuring chiefly in the south and known as the Crow's Nest Volcanics. It is called the disturbed area because the beds of sandstone and shale, cradled between the ranges, are often found pitched on edge or as inverted cylinders. The most remarkable feature both within and without the mountains, is that both main streams and inconsiderable streams occupying wide valleys flow on transverse strike lines rather than north and south. Yet nowhere on these streams have colors of gold ever been found, though it is safe to say, everyone has been prospected by someone at some time or other since the finding of the Lemon Mine.

If one were to give credence to stories that drifted down from the early days, the search for this Eldore has claimed more than Blackjack's life. There is the story of a white man's skeleton found in the gap of the Old Man River, and with it a bag of gold. This is the story of two men badly

wounded stopping over night in the 90's at a ranch in the foothills. They carried gold dust and were fleeing from the West. They rode away next morning for Fort McLeod, but never arrived. Had they re-discovered the lost Lemon Mine and then were followed and killed by the Indians?

From time to time old mounds are found, the remains of cabins, old rusted muzzle-loading guns and I.C. Baker tin containers date these. But a man in the mountains does not abandon his outfit.